

# The Use and Implementation of Body Worn Cameras in Policing

Gurjiwan Kaila

## Introduction

Ever since there was a rise in police use of force incidents against minorities in the U.S. in 2014, there has been a high public demand for an increase in police accountability and transparency. Thousands of U.S. police agencies rushed to implement body worn camera (BWC) programs into their departments to record their interactions with citizens in the hopes that this will reduce the number of complaints against the police and hold police officers accountable; however, a BWC program may bring significant financial costs for a police department. The research study was conducted because the need for more research in this area is crucial as police agencies consider their potential adoption of BWCs.

## Background

The research study was conducted to answer the following question: How will the implementation of BWCs support police officers in their line of duty? The aim of this applied research project was to offer information, conclusions, and recommendations that may support police agencies to determine whether or not there is any value for BWCs in their departments. The scope of the research study was to analyze current literature, reports, and policies to determine the use of BWCs and the impact of the cameras on police behavior. The reports were also analyzed to determine the benefits of BWCs, challenges of BWCs, and gaps in previous research. From this analysis, this research study was able to draw conclusions and provide recommendations to address issues and concerns pertaining to the implementation of BWCs.

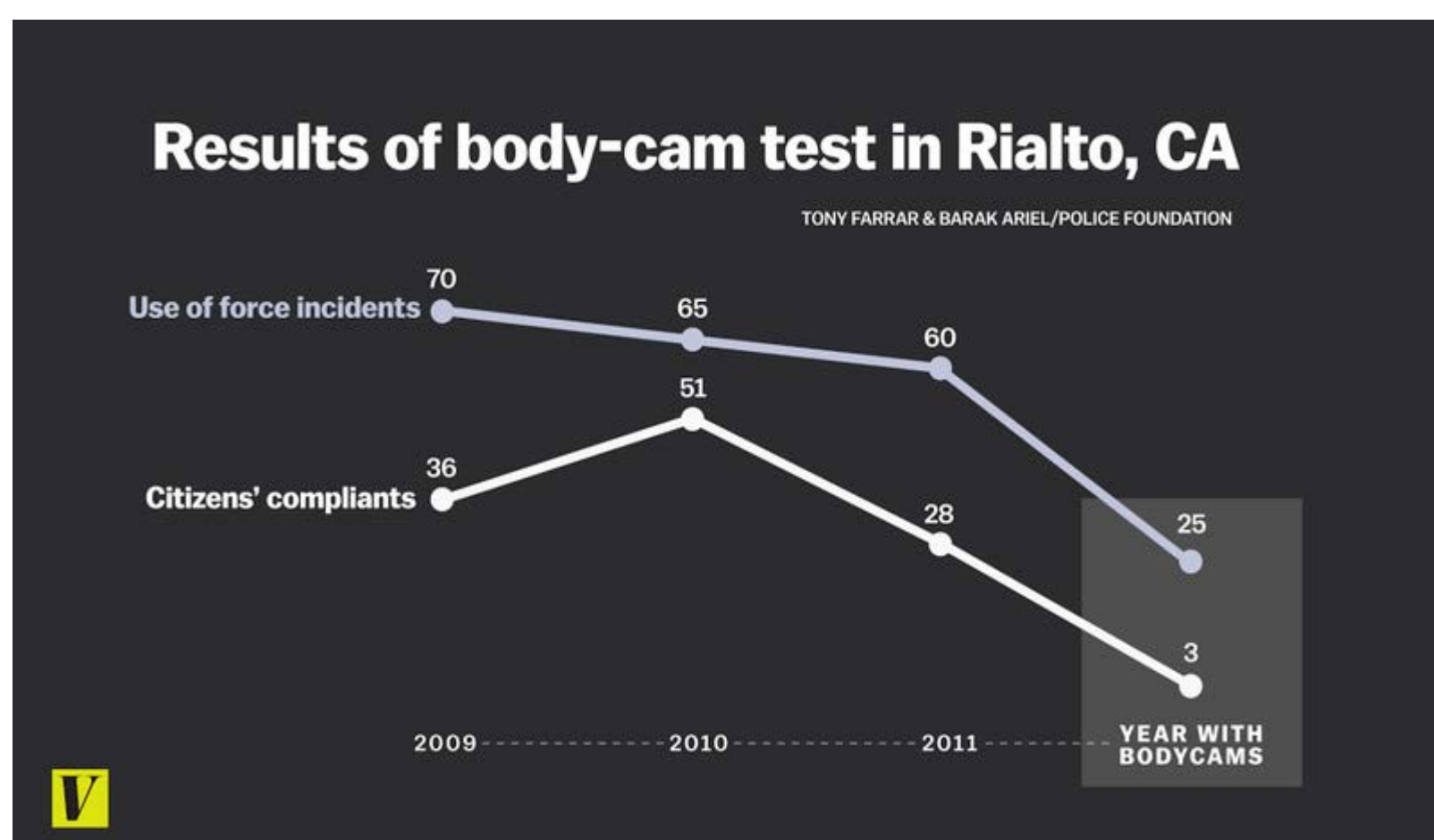
## Methods

The research was conducted using a qualitative research methodology design. Conducting a qualitative research methodology helped to offer interpretations upon collecting and analyzing existing data. A literature review was conducted collecting information from 18 peer reviewed and scholarly journal articles pertinent to the research project topic. This anonymized secondary data was compared to reports obtained from the New York Police Department (NYPD), Toronto Police Service (TPS), Edmonton Police Service (EPS), and Calgary Police Service (CPS).

## Results/Findings

The findings determined that the adoption of BWC programs can improve transparency, provide great evidence for investigations, and correct many internal problems police agencies exhibit (Miller & Toliver, 2014). Other benefits included the reduction of citizen complaints and the resolving of complaint cases against officers using recorded video evidence (IACP, 2012). Following a 12 month study in a California police department, there was a 60% reduction in officer use of force incidents. The shifts without cameras experienced twice as many use of force incidents as the shifts that were using cameras. The study found that the use of BWCs reduced citizens' complaints by 88% (Miller & Toliver, 2014).

Invasion of privacy is a major concern and to date, there is no freedom of information and privacy legislation in Canada that specifically refers to police use of BWCs (Edmonton Police Service, 2015). Officers have mixed perceptions about BWCs, while the general public maintains a positive view. Katz, Choate, Ready, and Nuño (2014) revealed that officers found the cameras to be comfortable, but downloading the data took too long, completing the reports took long, and there were concerns the footage could be used against them. Lastly, the high cost is preventing many agencies from implementing BWC programs. However, some studies have stated it is worth it to implement BWC programs, because BWCs would save costs on complaint investigations, use of force investigations, use of force lawsuits, and court cases.



## Discussion

BWCs are important for the public to feel safe, for police to be held accountable, and for video evidence to refute false complaints against officers. Some pilot project studies did not determine any significant changes with the BWCs, due to the limitation that many of these studies were conducted for only a couple of months. Since the implementation of this technology is relatively new, there may be more significant results shown in the future when BWCs are used in agencies for a longer period of time.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Several conclusions and recommendations were made from this research. Prior to implementing a program, law enforcement agencies need to identify their objectives for using this technology and consider the benefits and costs of BWC programs. If there is a considerable need for this program, it is suggested that pilot projects be conducted to test the technology and see if it is a good fit for the department. The program needs to have a well planned and developed policy, and departments should consider the significant risks before equipping officers with BWCs.

These written policies should layout how cameras will be used and how footage will be stored. An organization should ensure proper safeguards, retention, destruction, and storage of recordings captured on BWCs. These policies should also determine when recording is required, whether officers have to announce that an encounter is being recorded, video download procedures, and how long video is to be retained. It is recommended that officers inform subjects when they are being recorded unless it is a situation where it would be impossible, or the situation is unsafe. Police departments must also ensure that they are consistent with applicable privacy laws and the legal constraints that may apply in their jurisdictions. Lastly, it is recommended that police departments get together and consult with the community and frontline officers to develop policies and best practices.

It is clear that BWCs provide multiple benefits; however, implementation of these programs may not be a suitable decision for all departments. Police departments may consider the recommendations mentioned in this research project, and it is hoped that this research study may offer police departments with valuable information as they consider their potential BWC program adoption.

## References

- Edmonton Police Service. (2015). *Body worn video: Considering the evidence* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <http://www.bwvsg.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Edmonton-Police-BWV-Final-Report.pdf>
- International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2014). *Body worn cameras model policy*. Retrieved from <http://www.iacp.org/model-policy/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/07/BodyWornCamerasPaper.pdf>
- Katz, C. M., Choate, D. E., Ready, J. R., & Nuño, L. (2014). *Evaluating the impact of officer worn body cameras in the Phoenix Police Department*. Retrieved from [https://www.bja.gov/bwc/pdfs/Evaluating-the-Impact-of\\_officer-Worn-Body-Cameras.pdf](https://www.bja.gov/bwc/pdfs/Evaluating-the-Impact-of_officer-Worn-Body-Cameras.pdf)
- Miller, L., & Toliver, J. (2014). *Implementing a body worn camera program: Recommendations and lessons learned*. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/472014912134715246869.pdf>

